

Comprehensive Tobacco-Free Policy Approved Unanimously at Fargo Elementary School

Fargo Cass Public Health Tobacco Prevention Program, 2013

Tobacco Use is Still a Problem: Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in North Dakota. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year 500 North Dakota kids under 18 years of age become new daily smokers. Additionally, 11,000 kids now under 18 will ultimately die prematurely from smoking. The current high school smoking rate in ND is 19.4%, with a higher percentage, 22.2, of male high school students using smokeless or spit tobacco.

The costs of tobacco exist not just in the realm of negative health effects, with heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, emphysema and countless others, but also in terms of dollars: ND residents' tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures costs each household \$547 per year, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

Prevention Strategy at Work: Because the health hazards of tobacco use have long been established, all ND local public health units have implemented a tobacco prevention program that includes a plan to decrease youth initiation of tobacco products. Part of this strategy involves partnering with school districts to assess current tobacco policy and identify potential areas for improvement.

Prior to March 2013, only three of the 11 school districts in Cass County had achieved the designation of having a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy. To achieve this designation, school policies must include 10 key elements that focus on creating a tobacco-free environment and changing social norms around tobacco use. To that end, local tobacco prevention coordinators meet with schools in their service area each year and complete an assessment of their current policy. The outcome of the assessment frames the discussion for potential opportunities to strengthen each policy.

In November 2012, a tobacco prevention coordinator from Fargo Cass Public Health contacted the Grace Lutheran Elementary School principal to request assistance in completing the required School Policy Assessment. Upon learning the school did not have an official smoke-free or tobacco-free policy, the coordinator offered to send sample language for a comprehensive policy to the principal, along with documents supporting a comprehensive tobacco-free policy. The principal shared the sample policy and justification at the March 5, 2013 Board of Education meeting for Grace Lutheran Elementary School. The policy was passed unanimously and immediately implemented. Fargo Cass Public Health, with funding from the Center for Tobacco Prevention and Control Policy, was able to provide tobacco-free zone signage to the school to assist with implementation and enforcement. A notice also went home in a school newsletter to ensure that all students and their families were aware of the new policy.